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THE CAPTIVE LION

AND OTHER POEMS

BY WILLIAM HENRY DAVIES

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THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA

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&
Other Poems

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The Captive Lion & Other Poems

By William Henry Davies

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The Captive Lion.

THOU that in fury with thy knotted tail
Hast made this iron floor thy beaten drum;
That now in silence walks thy little space—
Like a sea-captain—careless what may come:

What power has brought your majesty to this,
Who gave those eyes their dull and sleepy look;
Who took their lightning out, and from thy throat
The thunder when the whole wide forest shook?

It was that man who went again, alone,
Into thy forest dark—Lord, he was brave!
That man a fly has killed, whose bones are left
Unburied till an earthquake digs his grave.

Oh, Sweet Content!

OH, sweet content, that turns the labourer's sweat,
To tears of joy, and shines the roughest face;
How often have I sought you high and low,
And found you still in some lone quiet place.

Here, in my room, when full of happy dreams,
With no life heard beyond that merry sound
Of moths that on my lighted ceiling kiss
Their shadows as they dance and dance around.

Or in a garden, on a summer's night,
When I have seen the dark and solemn air
Blink with the blind bat's wings, and heaven's bright face
Twitch with the stars that shine in thousands there.

The Villain

WHILE joy gave clouds the light of stars,
That beamed where'er they looked;
And calves and lambs had tottering knees,
Excited, while they sucked;
While every bird enjoyed his song,
Without one thought of harm or wrong—
I turned my head and saw the wind,
Not far from where I stood,
Dragging the corn by her golden hair,
Into a dark and lonely wood.

Love Speechless

I LOOK on Nature and my thoughts,
Like nimble skaters, skim the land;
But when I watch my loved one near,
My thoughts are walkers in soft sand.

I am a man that sees a sky
Alive with stars that cannot rest;
My eyes are here, my eyes are there,
Above, and then below her breast.

Much like the summer's bee am I,
A thousand flowers before his eyes;
He, knowing each one's power to please,
No sooner settles than must rise.

I sit bewildered by those charms
That follow wave by wave all day;
When I would with one wave make free,
The others take my breath away.

The Dog

THE dog was there, outside her door,
She gave it food and drink,
She gave it shelter from the cold:
It was the night young Molly robbed
An old fool of his gold.

"Molly," I said, "you'll go to hell——"
And yet I half believed
That ugly, famished, tottering cur
Would bark outside the gates of Heaven,
To open them for Her!

The Rat

"THAT woman there is almost dead,
Her feet and hands like heavy lead;
Her cat's gone out for his delight,
He will not come again this night.

"Her husband in a pothouse drinks,
Her daughter at a soldier winks;
Her son is at his sweetest game,
Teasing the cobbler old and lame.

"Now with these teeth that powder stones,
I'll pick at one of her cheekbones:
When husband, son and daughter come,
They'll soon see who was left at home."

The Cat

WITHIN that porch, across the way,
I see two naked eyes this night;
Two eyes that neither shut nor blink,
Searching my face with a green light.

But cats to me are strange, so strange—
I cannot sleep if one is near;
And though I'm sure I see those eyes,
I'm not so sure a body's there!

Today

I HAVE no hopes, I have no fears,
Whether my dreams are gossamers
To last beyond my body's day,
Or cobwebs to be brushed away.
Give me this life from hour to hour,
From day to day, and year to year;
This cottage with one extra room
To lodge a friend if he should come;
This garden green and small, where I
Can sit and see a great big sky.
And give me one tall shady tree,
Where, looking through the boughs, I'll see
How the sharp leaves can cut the skies
Into a thousand small blue eyes.

How Kind is Sleep

HOW kind is sleep, how merciful:
That I last night have seen
The happy birds with bosoms pressed
Against the leaves so green.

Sweet sleep, that made my mind forget
My love had gone away;
And nevermore I'd touch her soft
Warm body, night or day.

So, every night deceived by sleep,
Let me on roses lie;
And leave the thorns of Truth for day,
To pierce me till I die.

The Force of Love

HAVE I now found an angel in Unrest,
That wakeful Love is more desired than sleep:
Though you seem calm and gentle, you shall show
The force of this strong love in me so deep.

Yes, I will make you, though you seem so calm,
Look from your blue eyes that divinest joy
As was in Juno's, when she made great Jove
Forget the war and half his heaven in Troy.

And I will press your lips until they mix
With my poor quality their richer wine:
Be my Parnassus now, and grow more green
Each upward step towards your top divine.

When Leaves Begin

WHEN leaves begin to show their heads,
Before they reach their curly youth;
And birds in streams are coming north,
With seas of music from the south;

Then—like a snail with horns outstretched—
My senses feel the air around;
There's not a move escapes my eyes,
My ears are cocked to every sound.

Till Nature to her greenest comes,
And—with her may that blossoms white—
Bursts her full bodice, and reveals
Her fair white body in the light.

Passion's Hounds

WITH mighty leaps and bounds,
I followed Passion's hounds,
My hot blood had its day;
Lust, Gluttony, and Drink,
I chased to Hell's black brink,
Both night and day.

I ate like three strong men,
I drank enough for ten,
Each hour must have its glass:
Yes, Drink and Gluttony
Have starved more brains, say I,
Than Hunger has.

And now, when I grow old,
And my slow blood is cold,
And feeble is my breath—
I'm followed by those hounds,
Whose mighty leaps and bounds
Hunt me to death.

Love Impeached

LISTEN for pity—I impeach
The tyrant Love that, after play,
Dribbles on Beauty's cheek, and still
Refuses to be moved away.

That, not content with many a kiss,
Plays with his fingers on her lip;
And if she turns her back to him,
Drums with his hand on either hip.

Sometimes he squeezes, then he slaps,
I've heard he even bites her breast.
Now, how can Beauty keep her charms,
If she gets neither sleep nor rest?

Is there no punishment, I ask—
No small corrections, soft and mild:
For let us never once forget
That, after all, he's but a child.

The Truth

SINCE I have seen a bird one day,
His head pecked more than half away;
That hopped about, with but one eye,
Ready to fight again, and die—
Ofttimes since then their private lives
Have spoilt that joy their music gives.

So when I see this robin now,
Like a red apple on the bough,
And question why he sings so strong,
For love, or for the love of song;
Or sings, maybe, for that sweet rill
Whose silver tongue is never still—

Ah, now there comes this thought unkind,
Born of the knowledge in my mind:
He sings in triumph that last night
He killed his father in a fight;
And now he'll take his mother's blood—
The last strong rival for his food.

The Coming of Peace

IT was the night when we expected news from
France,
To say the war was over, and the fighting done;
The tidings that would make my heart rejoice at
last,
For foe as well as friend, and make the peoples
one.

And as I moved amidst that silent multitude,
Feeling the presence of a wild excitement there,
The world appeared to me so strange and
wonderful—
I almost heard a cuckoo in Trafalgar Square!

April's Lambs

"THOUGH I was born in April's prime,
With many another lamb,
Yet, thinking now of all my years,
What am I but a tough old ram?"

"No woman thinks of years," said she,
"Or any tough old rams,
When she can hear a voice that bleats
As tenderly as any lamb's."

The Coming of Spring

HOW I have watched thy coming, Spring,
From back in March, thy first-born day,
When smiles, all meaningless and strange,
Would twist thy face and pass away;
Such as will cross the faces of
Our babes before they grow to love,
Or wonder at the new-made light—
To this, thy great, all-smiling hour,
When thou hast soul and sight.

How I have waited for this day,
When thou, sweet Spring, art three weeks old;
And I can hear that strange, sweet voice,
To seal the wonder of thy world;
That lifts the heart of old and young
To sing an echo to that song
Which cries "cuckoo" in every grove;
When I, who did but smile before,
Must laugh outright for love.

A Song

MY love has gone long since,
She sleeps, and yet I stay;
To think of her is my
Good night till break of day.
So, in my room, alone,
I still awake am keeping;
Thinking of my white heaven,
And all its angels sleeping.

Sleep shall not hold me yet,
Her power I'll not obey;
I fear she has strange dreams
To take my love away.
So, in my room, alone,
I still awake am keeping;
Thinking of my white heaven,
And all its angels sleeping.

Love's Caution

TELL them, when you are home again,
How warm the air was now;
How silent were the birds and leaves,
And of the moon's full glow;
And how we saw afar
A falling star:
It was a tear of pure delight
Ran down the face of Heaven this happy night.

Our kisses are but love in flower,
Until that greater time
When, gathering strength, those flowers take wing,
And Love can reach his prime.
And now, my heart's delight,
Good night, good night;
Give me the last sweet kiss—
But do not breathe at home one word of this!

Trees

THEY ask me where the Temple stands,
And is the Abbey far from there;
They ask the way to old St. Paul's,
And where they'll find Trafalgar Square.

As I pass on with my one thought
To find a quiet place with trees,
I answer him, I answer her,
I answer one and all of these.

When I sit under a green tree,
Silent, and breathing all the while
As easy as a sleeping child,
And smiling with as soft a smile—

Then, as my brains begin to work,
This is the thought that comes to me:
Were such a peace more often mine,
I'd live as long as this green tree.

What County?

WHAT county sends me this surprise,
That had more rainbows in its skies—
More songsters in its woods and fields,
Than any other county yields?
For, judging her by her fresh look,
She never lived in grime and smoke.
So here we are, the thrush and I—
How we enjoy our ecstasy!
While one blue egg employs his tongue,
For two blue eyes I sing my song.
Yet when I think how my love's eyes
Shine with a soul so clear and wise,
Your egg, poor bird, I fear to tell,
May have no baby in its shell.
Yon cuckoo too, whose voice doth fail
When more than one sing in one vale,
Hear how her voice becomes more sweet
Among a number, when they meet.
And yon pale star that loses light
When other stars appear in sight,
See how her light is magnified,
With other women at her side.

A Child's Pet

WHEN I sailed out of Baltimore,
With twice a thousand head of sheep,
They would not eat, they would not drink,
But bleated o'er the deep.

Inside the pens we crawled each day,
To sort the living from the dead;
And when we reached the Mersey's mouth,
Had lost five hundred head.

Yet every night and day one sheep,
That had no fear of man or sea,
Stuck through the bars its pleading face,
And it was stroked by me.

And to the sheep-men standing near,
"You see," I said, "this one tame sheep?
It seems a child has lost her pet,
And cried herself to sleep."

So every time we passed it by,
Sailing to England's slaughter-house,
Eight ragged sheep-men—tramps and thieves—
Would stroke that sheep's black nose.

The Flirt

A PRETTY game, my girl,
To play with me so long;
Until this other lover
Comes dancing to thy song,
And my affair is over.

But love, though well adored,
Is not my only note:
So let thy false love-prattle
Be in another man's throat
That weaker man's death-rattle.

Ah, such as thou, at last,
Wilt take a false man's hand:
Think kindly then of me,
When thou'rt forsaken, and
The shame sits on thy knee.

The Clock

EVERY tick and every tock
That comes from my old clock,
Keeps time to Molly's step;
And when it cries "Cuckoo,"
Her hand should knock below.

Unless—for now I see
The clock looks down at me
With a white and silent face;
It stops, and not one beat
Keeps time to Molly's feet.

Then, staring at that clock,
Whose every tick and tock
Should be one step of hers,
"Why have you stopped," I said—
"Has Molly dropped down dead?"

A Bird's Anger

A SUMMER'S morning that has but one voice;
Five hundred stooks, like golden lovers, lean
Their heads together, in their quiet way,
And but one bird sings, of a number seen.

It is the lark, that louder, louder sings,
As though but this one thought possessed his mind:
"You silent robin, blackbird, thrush, and finch,
I'll sing enough for all you lazy kind!"

And when I hear him at this daring task,
"Peace, little bird," I say, "and take some rest;
Stop that wild, screaming fire of angry song,
Before it makes a coffin of your nest."

Bird and Brook

MY song, that's bird-like in its kind,
Is in the mind,
Love—in the mind;
And in my season I am moved
No more or less from being loved;
No woman's love has power to bring
My song back when I cease to sing;
Nor can she, when my season's strong,
Prevent my mind from song.

But where I feel your woman's part,
Is in the heart,
Love—in the heart;
For when that bird of mine broods long,
And I'd be sad without my song,
Your love then makes my heart a brook
That dreams in many a quiet nook,
And makes a steady, murmuring sound
Of joy the whole year round.

When Autumn's Fruit

WHEN Autumn's fruit is packed and stored,
And barns are full of corn and grain;
When leaves come tumbling down to earth,
Shot down by wind or drops of rain:
Then up the road we'll whistling go,
And, with a heart that's merry,
We'll rob the squirrel of a nut,
Or blackbird of a berry.

When Winter's bare and cold for all,
Save lovers with their spawny eyes;
And, like a horse that fleas annoy,
We stamp, to make our spirits rise:
Then out of doors we'll whistling go,
And, with a heart that's merry,
We'll feed—while richer squirrels sleep—
The birds that have no berry.

One Thing Wanting

"YOUR life was hard with mangling clothes,
You scrubbed our floors for years;
But now, your children are so good,
That you can rest your poor old limbs,
And want for neither drink nor meat."
"It's true," she said, and laughed for joy;
And still her voice, with all her years,
Could make a song-bird wonder if
A rival sweetness challenged him.
But soon her face was full of trouble:
"If I could only tear," she said,
"My sister Alice out of her grave—
Who taunted me when I was poor—
And make her understand these words:
'See, I have everything I want,
My children, Alice, are so good'—
If I could only once do that,
There's nothing else I want on earth."

The Mint

NATURE has made my mind a mint,
  My thoughts are coins, on which I live;
The dies, with which I stamp my thoughts,
  Trees, blossoms, birds, and children give.

Sometimes my die's a homeless man,
  Or babes that have no milk and perish;
Sometimes it is a lady fair,
  Whose grace and loveliness I relish.

But all my love-thoughts, until now,
  Were false to utter, and must cease;
And not another coin must pass
  Without your image on each piece.

So you shall be my queen from now,
  Your face on every thought I utter;
And I'll be rich—although the world
  May judge my metal's worth no better.

Worm-Proof

"HAVE I not bored your teeth," said Time,
"Until they drop out, one by one:
I'll turn your black hairs into white,
And pluck them when the change is done;
The clothes you've put away with care,
My worm's already in their seams——"
"Time, hold your tongue, for man can still
Defy you with his worm-proof dreams."

Comfort

FROM my own kind I only learn
How foolish comfort is;
To gather things that happy minds
Should neither crave nor miss:
Fine brackets to adorn my walls,
Whose tales are quickly told;
And copper candlesticks or brass,
Which soon must leave me cold.

From my own kind I only learn
That comfort breeds more care;
But when I watch our smaller lives,
There's plainness everywhere:
That little bird is well content,
When he no more can sing,
To close his eyes and tuck his head
Beneath his own soft wing.

Her Mouth and Mine

AS I lay dreaming, open-eyed,
With some one sitting at my side,
I saw a thing about to fly
Into my face, where it would lie;
For just above my head there stood
A smiling hawk as red as blood.
On which the bird, whose quiet nest
Has always been in my left breast,
Seeing that red hawk hovering there,
And smiling with such deadly care—
Flew fascinated to my throat,
And there it moaned a feeble note.
I saw that hawk, so red, and still,
And closed my eyes—it had its will:
For, uttering one triumphant croon,
It pounced with sudden impulse down;
And there I lay, no power to move,
To let it kiss or bite its love.
But in those birds—Ah, it was strange—
There came at last this other change:
That fascinated bird of mine
Worried the hawk and made it whine;
The hawk cried feebly—"Oh dear, oh!
Greedy-in-love, leave go! Leave go!"

Let Me Confess

LET me confess, before I die,
I sing for gold enough to buy
A little house with leafy eyes
That open to the Southern skies;

Where I, in peace from human strife,
Will wish no Lazarus brought to life.
Around my garden I will see
More wild flowers than are known to me;

With those white hops, whose children are
Big, heavy casks of ale and beer;
And little apples, from whose womb
Barrels of lusty cider come.

Good food, and ale that's strong in brew,
And wine, I'll have; clear water too,
From a deep well, where it doth lie
Shining as small as my own eye.

And any friend may come to share
What comfort I am keeping there;
For though my sins are many, one
Shall not be mine, when my life's done:
A fortune saved by one that's dead,
Who saw his fellows starve for bread.

Love's Silent Hour

THIS is Love's silent hour, before the tongue
Can find expression happy in a song;
Yet your sweet, generous lips shall have their hour,
Believe me, when my song comes back to power;
So shall those eyes, so dark, so warm, and deep,
That wake for me, and for all others sleep:
Meanwhile I do no more than sit and sigh,
Watching your movements with a greedy eye.

Those birds that sing so sweet in their green bogs,
Their season over, croak like common frogs:
My thoughts, I hoped, would like those nightingales
Sing sweet for you, but still my music fails;
My music fails, and I can only kiss
Your cheek and chin, and to myself say this—
There never was a thing so fair and bright,
By sun or moon, by gas or candle-light.

Now That She Gives

NOW that she gives my love consent,
I hear an evil spirit near;
A mocking spirit, day and night,
That whispers threats in either ear.

"Since you are twice her age," it says,
"Thick-lipped, with features large and coarse;
And she, so young and beautiful,
Could all her life do nothing worse;

"Since she, poor girl, mistakes for love
The feelings that possess her heart—
She must be daft, and you, strong wretch,
Should burn in hell for such a part!"

You Interfering Ladies

YOU interfering ladies, you
That prove your minds enjoy less rest
Than those poor mortals you advise,
Whose habits shock your dainty taste—
Peace, let the poor be free to do
The things they like—be happy, you!

Let boys and girls kiss here and there,
Men drink, and smoke the strongest weed;
Let beggars, who'll not wash with soap,
Enjoy their scratching till they bleed:
Let all poor women, if they please,
Enjoy a pinch of snuff, and sneeze.

Ladies' Men

MEN that have strength to rule their sex
Leave women still unmoved;
Men that by women are preferred—
By that strange sex adored and loved—
Will rise by neither deed nor word.

When women's dainty heroes are
Conferring with strong men,
They sit in fear, as dumb as graves;
So, ladies, your sweet darlings then,
What are they but our strong men's slaves?

The Song of Life

The Song of Life

I

A SNEEZE from Time gives Life its little breath;
Time yawns, and lo! he swallows Life in Death;
When we forget, and laugh without a care,
Time's Prompter, Death, reminds us what we are.

II

O thou vain fool, to waste thy breath and theirs,
Who pipes this day to make thy fellows dance;
To-morrow Death will make thy body show
How worms can dance without thy music once.

III

We are but fools, no matter what we do.
By hand or brain we work, and waste our breath;
Life's but a drunkard, in his own strange way,
Sobered at last by thy strong physic, Death.

IV

Life is a fisherman, and Time his stream,
But what he catches there is but a dream;
Our Youth and Beauty, Riches, Power and Fame,
Must all return at last from whence they came.

V

Death gives a Royal Prince the same dumb grin
As to the beggar's wayside brat of sin.
The cunning Spider soon himself must lie
Dead in that trap he sets to catch a Fly.

VI

Time grants to man no freehold property;
The power of man, however great it be,
Is only granted here for a short lease.
Voices the world has called divine must cease.

VII

Fools that we think of Fame, when there's a force
To make a coffin of this world of ours
And sweep it clean of every living thing—
What then becomes of man and all his powers?

VIII

Think of our giants now—they're auctioneers,
That shout and hammer for the people's cheers;
They blow in gales, but no good ear can find
The small clear voice that deepens Nature's wind.

IX

We call these rockets steadfast stars, and give
Them honours, wealth, and swear their works will live;
We call them giants, while the greater ones
Move like dark planets round those favoured suns.

X

This world, that licks them with its pleasant slime,
Will swallow them in but a little time;
Their Fame's like Death's, when that cold villain places
Bright looks of youth on dying old men's faces.

XI

We pass away, forgotten and neglected.
When thou, poor fool, hast lately filled thy grave,
Thy friends will bring thee cut and costly flowers,
Flowers that will leave no living seed behind,
And fade and perish in a few short hours.

XII

Perchance they'll set the soil with roots of plants
To live and bloom again there, year by year,
Moistened at times by Heaven's dew or rain—
But never once a loving human tear.

XIII

Plants that will need no help from human hands
To make thy grave look lovely, warm and sweet—
When all, except the fierce wild cat, has gone,
That lies in wait to pounce upon those birds
That beat the snails to death against thy stone.

XIV

I hear men say: "This Davies has no depth,
He writes of birds, of staring cows and sheep,
And throws no light on deep, eternal things——"
And would they have me talking in my sleep?

XV

I say: "Though many a man's ideas of them
Have made his name appear a shining star,
Yet Life and Death, Time and Eternity,
Are still left dark, to wonder what they are.

XVI

"And if I make men weigh this simple truth,
It is on my own mind the light is thrown;
I throw no light on that mysterious Four,
And, like the great ones, nothing I make known."

XVII

Yet I believe that there will come at last
A mighty knowledge to our human lives:
And blessèd then will be the fools that laugh,
Without the fear Imagination gives.

XVIII

Aye, even now, when I sit here alone,
I feel the breath of that strange terror near;
But as my mind has not sufficient strength
To give it shape or form of any kind,
I turn to things I know, and banish fear.

XIX

I turn to Man, and what do I behold?
What is the meaning of this rush and tear
To ride from home by water, land, or air?
We'll want the horses soon, when our life fails,
To drag a corpse along as slow as snails.

XX

Why should this toil from early morn till night
Employ our minds and bodies, when the Earth
Can carry us forever round the Sun
Without the help of any mortal birth?

XXI

And why should common shelter, bread and meat,
Keep all our faculties in their employ,
And leave no time for ease, while Summer's in
The greenwood, purring like a cat for joy?

XXII

For still the People are no more than slaves;
Each State a slave-ship, and no matter which
The figure-head—a President or King;
The People are no more than common grass
To make a few choice cattle fat and rich.

XXIII

They toil from morn till eve, from Youth to Age;
They go from bud to seed, but never flower.
"Ah," says the Priest, "we're born to suffer here
A hell on earth till God Almighty's Hour."

XXIV

A hell on earth? . . . We'll ask the merry Moth
That, making a partner of his shadow thrown,
Dances till out of breath; we'll ask the Lark
That meets the Rain half-way and sings it down.

XXV

In studying Life we see this human world
Is in three states—of copper, silver, gold,
And those that think in silver take the joy;
Thinking in copper, gold, the poor and rich
Keep mis'ry in too little and too much.

XXVI

Though with my money I could cram a mouth
Big as an Alpine gorge with richest stuff,
Yet Nature sets her bounds; and with a lake
Of wine—to-night one bottle is enough.

XXVII

If I can pluck the rose of sunset, or
The Moon's pale lily, and distil their flower
Into one mental drop to scent my soul—
I'll envy no man his more worldly power.

XXVIII

What matters that my bed is soft and white,
If beggars sleep more sweet in hay, or there,
Lying at noon beneath those swaying boughs
Whose cooling shadows lift the heavy air.

XXIX

Not owning house or land, but in the space
Our minds inhabit, we are rich or poor:
If I had youth, who dances in his walk,
On heels as nimble as his lighter toes,
I'd set no price on any earthly store.

XXX

And wine and women, both have had their day,
When nothing else would my crazed thoughts allow;
Until my nerves shook like those withered leaves
Held by a broken cobweb to the bough.

XXXI

I touched my mistress lightly on the chin,
That girl so merciless in her strong passion:
"Since love," she said, "has reached that flippant mood—
With no more care than that—I'd rather you
Had struck my mouth, and dashed my lips with blood."

XXXII

And is there naught in life but lust? thought I;
Feeble my brain was then, and small, and weak;
She held it in her power, even as a bird
With his live breakfast squirming from his beak.

XXXIII

Man finds in such a Woman's breast the tomb
Where his creative powers must soon lie dumb;
To kiss the tomb in weakness, hour by hour,
Wherein she buries half his mental power.

XXXIV

They say that under powerful drugs the tongue
Will babble wildly of some sin or wrong
That never happened—even virgins then
Tell devilish lies about themselves and men.

XXXV

Under that drug of lust my brain was mazed,
And oft I babbled in a foolish way;
And still she bounced the babies in her eyes,
For Love's mad challenge not to miss one day.

XXXVI

But that is passed, and I am ready now
To come again, sweet Nature, to your haunts;
Not come together like a snake and stone,
When neither body gives the other heat—
But full of love to last till Life has gone.

XXXVII

A little while and I will come again,
From my captivity in this strange place;
That has these secret charms to lure me on,
In every alley dark and open space;

XXXVIII

That makes me like the jealous lover who,
Eavesdropping at a keyhole, trembles more
Because the silence there is worse to him than
sound,
And nothing's heard behind the fastened door.

XXXIX

To you I'll come, my old and purer friend,
With greater love in these repentant hours;
To let your Brooks run singing to my lips;
And walk again your Meadows full of flowers.

XL

I'll stroke again the foreheads of your Cows,
And clothe my fingers in your Horses' manes;
I'll hear that music, when a pony trots
Along your hard, white country roads and lanes.

XLI

Kissed with his warm eyelashes touching mine,
I'll lie beneath the Sun, on golden sheaves;
Or see him from the shade, when in his strength
He makes frail cobwebs of the solid leaves.

XLII

I'll see again the green leaves suddenly
Turned into flowers by resting butterflies;
While all around are small, brown, working bees,
And hairy black-and-ambers, twice their size.

XLIII

And there'll be ponds that lily-leaves still keep—
Though rough winds blow there—lying fast asleep.
And pools that measure a cloud from earth to sky,
To sink it down as deep as it is high.

XLIV

And many a charming truth will I discover;
How birds, after a wetting in the rain,
Can make their notes come twice as sweet; and then
How sparrows hop with both their legs together,
While pigeons stride leg after leg, like men.

XLV

Nature for me, in every mood she has;
And frosty mornings, clear and cold, that blind
The cattle in a mist of their own breath—
Shall never come and find my heart unkind.

XLVI

And I'll forget these deep and troubled thoughts;
How, like a saucy puppy, Life doth stand
Barking upon this world of crumbling sand;
Half in defiance there, and half in fear—
For still the waves of Time are drawing near.

XLVII

Would birds, if they had thoughts of their short days,
Stand on the boughs and carol such sweet lays?
Is it not better then that we should join
The birds in song than sit in grief and pine?

XLVIII

Come, let us laugh—though there's no wit to hear;
Come, let us sing—though there's no listener near;
Come, let us dance—though none admire our grace,
And be the happier for a private place.

XLIX

A quiet life with Nature is my choice
And, opening there my Book of Memory,
The record of my wild young roving blood—
I'll sail the seas again, and reach strange ports,
And light a fire in many a silent wood.

L

Under white blossoms spread all over him,
Have I not seen the Ocean laugh and roll;
And watched a boundless prairie, when it lay
So full of flowers it could employ the whole
World's little ones to pick them in a day?

LI

I'll sail the great Atlantic, whose strong waves
Could lift the ship "Tritonia" up so high
That to my wondering mind it ofttimes seemed
About to take the air above, and fly!

LII

Up North I'll go, where steel, more cold than death,
Can burn the skin off any naked hands—
Down to those woods where I'll at midnight read
By one fat glow-worm's light in Southern lands.

LIII

I'll see again, in dreams, the full-rigged Ship
Wearing the Moon as a silver ring at night
On her main finger; while the water shines,
Fretted with island-shadows in the light.

LIV

With all the wealth of Heaven: those perfect stars
That draw near earth in numbers to amaze;
The bubble-light of others deep impooled,
The shadowy lustre of those lesser rays.

LV

I'll see again, in my long winter dreams,
That iceberg in the North, whose glorious beams
Fluttered in their cold prison, while the Sun
Went up and down with our good ship, like one.

LVI

I'll dream of Colorado's rushing stream;
And how I heard him slap his thighs of stone
So loud that Heaven had never power to make
His cañon hear more thunder than his own.

LVII

There will I live with Nature, there I'll die;
And if there's any Power in Heaven above,
A God of vengeance, mercy, and sweet love—
If such a judge there be, I can but trust
In Him for what is only fair and just.

LVIII

I'll place my hope in some few simple deeds
That sacrificed a part of my own needs
All for the love of poor Humanity—
Without a single thought, O Lord, of Thee.

Raptures

SING for the sun your lyric, lark,
Of twice ten thousand notes;
Sing for the moon, you nightingales,
Whose light shall kiss your throats;
Sing, sparrows, for the soft, warm rain,
To wet your feathers through;
And, when a rainbow's in the sky,
Sing you, cuckoo—"Cuckoo!"

Sing for your five blue eggs, fond thrush,
By many a leaf concealed;
You starlings, wrens, and blackbirds sing
In every wood and field:
While I, who fail to give my love
Long raptures twice as fine,
Will for her beauty breathe this one—
A sigh, that's more divine.

Confession

ONE hour in every hundred hours
I sing of childhood, birds and flowers;
Who reads my character in song
Will not see much in me that's wrong.

But in my ninety hours and nine
I would not tell what thoughts are mine:
They're not so pure as find their words
In songs of childhood, flowers and birds.

Easter

WHAT exultations in my mind
From the love-bite of this Easter wind!
My head thrown back, my face doth shine
Like yonder Sun's, but warmer mine.
A butterfly—from who knows where?—
Comes with a stagger through the air,
And, lying down, doth ope and close
His wings, as babies work their toes:
Perhaps he thinks of pressing tight
Into his wings a little light!
And many a bird hops in between
The leaves he dreams of, long and green,
And sings for nipple-buds that show
Where the full-breasted leaves must grow.
Winter is dead, and now we sing
This welcome to the new-born Spring.

My Love Could Walk

MY Love could walk in richer hues
Than any bird of paradise,
And no one envy her her dress:
Since in her looks the world would see
A robin's love and friendliness.

And she could be the lily fair,
More richly dressed than all her kind,
And no one envy her her gain:
Since in her looks the world would see
A daisy that was sweet and plain.

Oh, she could sit like any queen
That's nailed by diamonds to a throne,
Her splendour envied by not one:
Since in her looks the world would see
A queen that's more than half a nun.

My Old Acquaintance

WORKING her toothless gums till her sharp chin
Could almost reach and touch her sharper nose,
These are the words my old acquaintance said:
"I have four children, all alive and well;
My eldest girl was seventy years in March,
And though when she was born her body was
Covered all over with black hair, and long,
Which when I saw at first made me cry out,
'Take it away, it is a monkey—ugh!'
Yet she's as smooth and fair as any, now.
And I, who sit for hours in this green space
That has seven currents of good air, and pray
At night to Jesus and His Mother, live
In hopes to reach my ninetieth year in June.
But ere it pleases God to take my soul,
I'll sell my fine false teeth, which cost five pounds,
Preserved in water now for twenty years,
For well I know those girls will fight for them
As soon as I am near my death; before
My skin's too cold to feel the feet of flies.
God bless you and good day—I wish you well.
For me, I cannot relish food, or sleep,
Till God sees fit to hold the Kaiser fast,
Stabbed, shot, or hanged—and his black soul
Sent into hell, to bubble, burn and squeal;
Think of the price of fish—and look at bacon!"

A Winter's Night

IT is a winter's night and cold,
The wind is blowing half a gale;
I, with a red-hot poker, stir
To take the chill off my old ale.

I drink my ale, I smoke my pipe,
While fire-flames leap to fight the cold;
And yet, before my bedtime comes,
I must look out on the wide world.

And what strange beauty I behold:
The wild fast-driven clouds this night
Hurled at the moon, whose smiling face
Still shines with undiminished light.

Birds

WHEN our two souls have left this mortal clay,
And, seeking mine, you think that mine is lost—
Look for me first in that Elysian glade
Where Lesbia is, for whom the birds sing most.

What happy hearts those feathered mortals have,
That sing so sweet when they're wet through in spring!
For in that month of May when leaves are young,
Birds dream of song, and in their sleep they sing.

And when the spring has gone and they are dumb,
Is it not fine to watch them at their play:
Is it not fine to see a bird that tries
To stand upon the end of every spray?

See how they tilt their pretty heads aside:
When women make that move they always please.
What cosy homes birds make in leafy walls
That Nature's love has ruined—and the trees.

Birds

Oft have I seen in fields the little birds
  Go in between a bullock's legs to eat;
But what gives me most joy is when I see
  Snow on my doorstep, printed by their feet.

Jove Warns Us

JOVE warns us with his lightning first,
Before he sends his thunder;
Before the cock begins to crow,
He claps his wings down under.
But I, who go to see a maid,
This springtime in the morning,
Fall under every spell she has,
Without a word of warning.

She little thinks what charms her breath
To cunning eyes reveal;
The waves that down her body glide,
That from her bosom steal.
Her moth-like plumpness caught my eye,
I watched it like a spider;
By her own hair my web is made,
To fasten me beside her.

The Excuse

"WHY did you kill that harmless frog?
Tell me, my little boy."
He hung his head for shame, and gone
Was all his joy.

But now a thought comes to his mind,
He lifts his head with pride:
"I only *half*-killed it," he said—
"And then it died."

In the Snow

HEAR how my friend the robin sings!
That little hunchback in the snow,
As it comes down as fast as rain.
The air is cold, the wind doth blow,
And still his heart can feel no pain.

And I, with heart as light as his,
And to my ankles deep in snow,
Hold up a fist as cold as Death's,
And into it I laugh and blow—
I laugh and blow my life's warm breath.

Molly

MOLLY, with hips and ankles plump,
With hands and feet and waist so small,
Whose breasts could carry flowers unpinned,
And not one blossom fall—
Give me your answer plain and true,
Do you love me as I love you?

Molly, as timid as a sheep
That trembles at the shadow
Of any harmless little bird
That flies across its meadow,
Are you a sweet good-tempered maid?
"Sometimes I'd crush a grape!" she said.

Molly, as gentle as the sun
That lifts the dew to Heaven's breast,
Of all the lovers you have had,
Am I the one that's loved the best?
"By all the men betrayed by me,
I swear I love you true," said she.

Killed in Action

(Edward Thomas)

HAPPY the man whose home is still
In Nature's green and peaceful ways;
To wake and hear the birds so loud,
That scream for joy to see the sun
Is shouldering past a sullen cloud.

And we have known those days, when we
Would wait to hear the cuckoo first;
When you and I, with thoughtful mind,
Would help a bird to hide her nest,
For fear of other hands less kind.

But thou, my friend, art lying dead:
War, with its hell-born childishness,
Has claimed thy life, with many more:
The man that loved this England well,
And never left it once before.

Lovely Dames

FEW are my books, but my small few have told
Of many a lovely dame that lived of old;
And they have made me see those fatal charms
Of Helen, which brought Troy so many harms;
And lovely Venus, when she stood so white
Close to her husband's forge in its red light.
I have seen Dian's beauty in my dreams,
When she had trained her looks in all the streams
She crossed to Latmos and Endymion;
And Cleopatra's eyes, that hour they shone
The brighter for a pearl she drank to prove
How poor it was compared to her rich love:
But when I look on thee, love, thou dost give
Substance to those fine ghosts, and make them
live.

The Shameless One

SHE comes to see her brother John,
She's with a man not met before;
To bring her brother's house to shame,
She comes a hundred miles and more.

And when her brother leaves his home,
She finds her sisters Maud and May;
She's drunk, and with another man,
And both her sisters hide away.

She'll follow them from place to place,
She'll find them yet, be sure of that;
And John will be a shivering dog
Before the eyes of a black cat.

The beggar-man has not more nits
Than she has sins, yet she'll not die:
The lightning, that would blind a child
A second time, has passed her by.

Cowslips and Larks

I HEAR it said yon land is poor,
In spite of those rich cowslips there—
And all the swinging larks it shoots
To heaven from the cowslips' roots.
But I, with eyes that beauty find,
And music ever in my mind,
Feed my thoughts well upon that grass
Which starves the horse, the ox, and ass.
So here I stand, two miles to come
To Shapwick and my ten-days-home,
Taking my summer's joy, although
The distant clouds are dark and low,
And comes a storm that, fierce and strong,
Has brought the Mendip Hills along:
Those hills that, when the light is there,
Are many a sunny mile from here.

We Arm to Fight

WE arm to fight the Kaiser's troops,
And every man will do his part;
One song was mine, a call to arms,
To cheer my country's heart,
My love—
To cheer my country's heart.

Yes, I who have the power of song
To arm maybe a hundred men,
Have made one call, and only one,
And armed no more than ten,
My love—
And armed no more than ten.

For now we meet, and my one cry
Is "Molly, Molly," night and day;
We fight the foe, and I am dumb:
Oh, kiss my shame away,
My love!
Oh, kiss my shame away!

Forgiveness

STUNG by a spiteful wasp,
I let him go life free:
That proved the difference
In him and me.

For, had I killed my foe,
It had proved me at once
The stronger wasp, and no
More difference.

That Day She Seized

THAT day she seized me like a bee,
To make me her weak blossom,
I felt her arms so strong that I
Lay helpless on her bosom.
But cunning I, by artful moves,
Soon had her in my power:
"Ah, Molly, who's the strong bee now—
And who's the poor weak flower?"

That time she thought I was a fly,
And she a great big spider,
She held me fast, my breath was gone,
As I lay bound beside her.
But cunning I, by artful moves,
Could laugh at last and cry:
"Ah, Molly, who's the spider now—
And who's the poor weak fly?"

The Bell

IT is the bell of death I hear,
Which tells me my own time is near,
When I must join those quiet souls
Where nothing lives but worms and moles;
And not come through the grass again,
Like worms and moles, for breath or rain;
Yet let none weep when my life's through,
For I myself have wept for few.

The only things that knew me well
Were children, dogs, and girls that fell;
I bought poor children cakes and sweets,
Dogs heard my voice and danced the streets;
And, gentle to a fallen lass,
I made her weep for what she was.
Good men and women know not me,
Nor love nor hate the mystery.

A Strange Meeting

THE moon is full, and so am I;
The night is late, the ale was good;
And I must go two miles and more
Along a country road.

Now what is this that's drawing near?
It seems a man, and tall;
But where the face should show its white
I see no white at all.

Where is his face: or do I see
The back part of his head,
And, with his face turned round about,
He walks this way? I said.

He's close at hand, but where's the face?
What devil is this I see?
I'm glad my body's warm with ale,
There's trouble here for me.

I clutch my staff, I make a halt,
"His blood or mine," said I.
"Good-night," the black man said to me,
As he went passing by.

When yon Full Moon

WHEN yon full moon's with her white fleet
of stars,
And but one bird makes music in the grove;
When you and I are breathing side by side,
Where our two bodies make one shadow, love;

Not for her beauty will I praise the moon,
But that she lights thy purer face and throat;
The only praise I'll give the nightingale
Is that she draws from thee a richer note.

For, blinded with thy beauty, I am filled,
Like Saul of Tarsus, with a greater light;
When he had heard that warning voice in Heaven,
And lost his eyes to find a deeper sight.

Come, let us sit in that deep silence then,
Launched on love's rapids, with our passions
proud,
That makes all music hollow—though the lark
Raves in his windy heights above a cloud.

Till I Went Out

TILL I went out of doors to prove
What through my window I saw move;
To see if grass was brighter yet,
And if the stones were dark and wet;

Till I went out to see a sign—
That slanted rain, so light and fine,
Had almost settled in my mind
That I at last could see the wind.

The Soul's Companions

THOUGH floods shall fail, and empty holes
Gape for the bright eyes of seas,
And fires devour stone walls and trees—
Thou, soul of mine, dost think to live
Safe in thy light, and laugh at these?

Thy bravery outwears all heat
And cold, all steel, all brass and stone;
When Time has mixed my flesh and bone
With rocks and roots of common plants—
Thy shining life will not be done.

Thou hast two children: one called Hope,
The other Doubt, who will not play,
And drives that brighter child away:
How sweet this life, if Hope alone
Would walk with me from day to day!

To my Thoughts

STAY home and hear the birds and bees,
And see the blossoms grow;
And mock them both—when Echo mocks
The bird that cries "Cuckoo";
For Love, alas!—now understood—
Has many a feather stained with blood.

Though you are my own children born,
I cannot keep you home;
For though I lock my body up
Inside an iron room,
You thoughts can still pass through the walls,
To follow her who never calls.

The Holly on the Wall

PLAY, little children, one and all,
For holly, holly on the wall.
You do not know that millions are
This moment in a deadly war;
Millions of men whose Christmas bells
Are guns' reports and bursting shells;
Whose holly berries, made of lead,
Take human blood to stain them red;
Whose leaves are swords, and bayonets too,
To pierce their fellow-mortals through.
For now the war is here, and men—
Like cats that stretch their bodies when
The light has gone and darkness comes—
Have armed and left their peaceful homes:
But men will be, when there's no war,
As gentle as you children are.
Play, little children, one and all,
For holly, holly on the wall.

How Late

NOW thou hast made me blind,
And I can only see,
In all the world, what comes from thee;

Now thou hast made me deaf,
And I can only hear
Thy voice, or body's motion near;

Now thou hast made me dumb,
And my two lips are mute,
Till yours have bid them follow suit;

Now blind and deaf and dumb
To all the world but thee—
How late thou art forsaking me!

Brothers

THEY lived together day and night,
Two brothers, all alone:
Six weeks had gone, and neighbours said—
"We see no more than one.

Where is thy brother Charlie, Tom?
And is he sick?" they said.
Said Tom, that man so queer and quaint—
"My brother's still in bed."

And every night they heard his voice,
Down on the stairs below:
"And are you still in bed and sick—
How are you, Charlie, now?"

They forced the doors and entered in,
Found Charlie on the bed:
"I see a dead man here alive,"
The old physician said.

"For see the worms! They bubble here
In pools upon his flesh:
They wag the beard that's on his chin—
This body is not fresh."

Then came a voice all sharp and clear,
Down on the stairs below:
"And are you still in bed and sick—
How are you, Charlie, now?"

Exalted Flower

NO more of that, you butterfly,
That lie so still on this green leaf,
Pretending you're a flower again,
And wings but bring you grief:
You have no cause, exalted flower,
To doubt your flying power.

No more of that! You with a gift
Not granted yet to any bee
Or bird that's flying in the air:
The precious gift to see
Dark tunnels in this open light,
And vanish out of sight.

What Thoughts are Mine

WHAT thoughts are mine when she is gone,
And I sit dreaming here, alone;
My fingers are the little people
That climb her breast to its red steeple;
And, there arrived, they play until
She wakes and murmurs—"Love, be still."

She is the patient, loving mare,
And I the colt to pull her hair;
She is the deer, and my desire
Pursues her like a forest fire;
She is the child, and does not know
What a fierce bear she calls "Bow-wow."

But, Lord, when her sweet self is near,
These very thoughts cause all my fear.
I sit beneath her quiet sense,
And each word fears its consequence;
So "Puss, Puss, Puss!" I cry. At that
I hang my head and stroke the cat.

Angel and Mystery

LO, I, that once was Fear, that hears
His own forgotten breath, and fears
The breath of something else is heard—
Am now bold Love, to dare the word;
No timid mouse am I, before
He'll cross a moonbeam on the floor.
So sit thou close, and I will pour
Into that rosy shell, thy ear,
My deep-sea passion; let me swear
There's nothing in the world so fair
As thy sweet face that does, and will,
Retain its baby roundness still:
With those two suns, thine eyes, that keep
Their light from clouds till Night brings sleep.
Forget my features, only see
The soul in them that burns for thee;
And never let it cross thy mind
That I am ugly for my kind.
Although the world may well declare,
"One is an angel sweet and fair,
But what it is that sits so close
Must rest with God—He only knows."

They're Taxing Ale Again

ALE'S no false liar; though his mind
Has thoughts that are not clear,
His honest heart speaks boldly out,
Without reserve or fear.
Though shaky as that bird the bat,
In its first flight at night,
Yet still old Ale will stand his ground
For either wrong or right.

Though Ale is poor, he's no man's slave,
He'll neither fawn nor lick;
He'd clap proud monarchs on the back,
And call them Ned or Dick.
They're taxing Ale again, I hear,
A penny more the can:
They're taxing poor old Ale again,
The only honest man.

The Girl is Mad

SHE changes oft—she laughs and weeps,
She smiles, and she can frown;
Should tears of sorrow fill her eyes,
Then laughter shakes them down:
The girl is mad—and yet I love her.

She smiles, and swears her jealousy
Would tear out my two eyes,
And make me swallow them by force:
These words are no strong lies,
For she is mad—and yet I love her.

"Ha, ha!" says she; "I've killed two men,
And you're the third I'll kill!"
If I keep time with her fierce love,
'Tis certain that she will:
The girl is mad—and yet I love her.

In Time of War

AS I go walking down the street
Many's the lad and lass I meet;
There's many a soldier I see pass,
And every soldier has his lass.

But when I saw the others there,
The women that black mourning wear,
"Judged by the looks of these," I said,
"The lads those lassies court are dead."

England

WE have no grass locked up in ice so fast
That cattle cut their faces and at last,
When it is reached, must lie them down and starve,
With bleeding mouths that freeze too hard to move.
We have not that delirious state of cold
That makes men warm and sing when in Death's hold.
We have no roaring floods whose angry shocks
Can kill the fishes dashed against their rocks.
We have no winds that cut down street by street,
As easy as our scythes can cut down wheat.
No mountains here to spew their burning hearts
Into the valleys, on our human parts.
No earthquakes here, that ring church bells afar,
A hundred miles from where those earthquakes are.
We have no cause to set our dreaming eyes,
Like Arabs, on fresh streams in Paradise.
We have no wilds to harbour men that tell
More murders than they can remember well.
No woman here shall wake from her night's rest,
To find a snake is sucking at her breast.
Though I have travelled many and many a mile,

And had a man to clean my boots and smile
With teeth that had less bone in them than gold—
Give me this England now for all my world.

Come, Let Us Find

COME, let us find a cottage, love,
That's green for half a mile around;
To laugh at every grumbling bee,
Whose sweetest blossom's not yet found.
Where many a bird shall sing for you,
And in our garden build its nest:
They'll sing for you as though their eggs
Were lying in your breast,
My love—
Were lying warm in your soft breast.

'Tis strange how men find time to hate,
When life is all too short for love;
But we, away from our own kind,
A different life can live and prove.
And early on a summer's morn,
As I go walking out with you,
We'll help the sun with our warm breath
To clear away the dew,
My love,
To clear away the morning dew.

The Birds of Steel

THIS apple-tree, that once was green,
Is now a thousand flowers in one!
And, with their bags strapped to their thighs,
There's many a bee that comes for sweets,
To stretch each bag to its full size.

And when the night has grown a moon,
And I lie half-asleep in bed,
I hear those bees again—ah no,
It is the birds of steel, instead,
Seeking their innocent prey below.

Man-ridden birds of steel, unseen,
That come to drop their murdering lime
On any child or harmless thing
Before the early morning time:
Up, nearer to God, they fly and sing.

Rags and Bones

THIS morning, as I wandered forth,
I heard a man cry, "Rags and Bones!"
And little children in the streets
Went home for bottles, bones and rags,
To barter for his toys and sweets.

And then I thought of grown-up man,
That in our dreams we trust a God
Will think our rags and bones a boon,
And give us His immortal sweets
For these poor lives cast off so soon.

The mind, they say, will gather strength
That broods on what is hard to know:
The fear of unfamiliar things
Is better than their parents' love,
To teach young birds to use their wings.

But riddles are not made for me,
My joy's in beauty, not its cause:
Then give me but the open skies,
And birds that sing in a green wood
That's snow-bound by anemones.

The Dancer

THE great white Moon is not so fair—
When not one trembling star will dare
To shine within her zone of air.

And lo, this blue-eyed maiden soon
Moves lightly to the music's tune—
Light as a water-fly in June.

As she goes spinning round and round,
Her nimble toes, without a sound,
Sip honey from the common ground.

Like the humming-bird that, swift and strong,
Will never suck but, flying along,
Just lick the blossoms with his tongue.

Dance, dance, thou blue-eyed wonder, dance!
I still believe there's one small chance
Thou'lt fall into my arms in a trance.

On Hearing Mrs. Woodhouse Play the Harpsichord

WE poets pride ourselves on what
We feel, and not what we achieve;
The world may call our children fools,
Enough for us that we conceive.
A little wren that loves the grass
Can be as proud as any lark
That tumbles in a cloudless sky,
Up near the sun, till he becomes
The apple of that shining eye.

So, lady, I would never dare
To hear your music ev'ry day;
With those great bursts that send my nerves
In waves to pound my heart away;
And those small notes that run like mice
Bewitched by light; else on those keys—
My tombs of song—you should engrave:
"My music, stronger than his own,
Has made this poet my dumb slave."

Passion's Greed

HIS constant wonder keeps him back
From flying either far or straight;
Confined by thy great beauty here,
My life is like that butterfly's,
With every source of wonder near.

Let me go burning to my death:
Nothing can come between our minds
To ease me of this passion's greed:
We'll bite each other's necks like dogs,
And ask our fingers if we bleed.

Late Singers

THE Spring was late in coming, so,
  Sweet bird, your songs are late:
Have you a certain number, then,
  Of verses to create?
If late to start means late to end,
You comfort me, sweet friend.

It was the summer of my life
  Ere I began to sing:
Will winter be my summer, then,
  As summer was my spring?
No matter how things change their hue,
We'll sing our number through.

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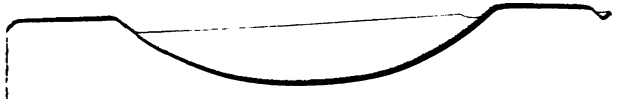

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